An Ebook on Talent Profiling & Talent Engagement

Executive Summary

Conventional ideas about talent or jobs are passé. A stable government post is hardly anybody's dream job. In fact, jobs with global IT brands too don't seem lucrative anymore.

A job seeker today, unlike in the old days, can't say bye-bye to learning the moment he or she passes out of college with a degree. Today, learning does not stop at the collegiate level; it continues until retirement.

In this day and age a job isn't necessarily something that you travel to; your smartphone could also be your workplace. You can sign up with one of the many online job platforms and find a job of your liking. Likewise, companies can also find talent from across the globe.

Technical innovations are rapidly and relentlessly rewriting the way we live and work the old ways of seeking talent and seeking jobs are now rendered redundant.

Amid this churn, if there's one aspect that has remained constant and promises to remain so it is our constant need for growth.

The word growth could mean different things to different people – for some it could mean wealth, for others it could mean power, social status, or recognition. But none of this is possible without s-talent development and talent engagement.

Talent development is the process by which we try to get better at what we do. . Think of it as education and training. Talent engagement, on the other hand, is about deploying our talent to create value for others. This is essentially about the job market.

Technology is dramatically reshaping both of these. Take the example of MOOCs (short for massive open online courses). These free, online courses about virtually everything under the sun are making their presence felt across the globe. They could well reshape how education is delivered and charged for in the years to come.

Likewise, online job platforms which link freelancers to short-term job opportunities are rewriting the rules of the jobs market the picture however, is woefully incomplete without a discussion on talent profiling.
The term quite simply means knowing what we are, so as to be what we want to be. For a company, it is about knowing what talent is needed so the right choice can be made.

By profiling their customers/users companies like Facebook and Amazon have shown us how profiling can be done. . The sheer diversity and dynamically changing skill set makes talent profiling an extremely challenging job.

To understand this complexity, let's understand the ingredients for talent. Some of them include:

a) Functional expertise – This is identified by subject matter knowledge and is enhanced by an awareness of the tools and technologies related to the area.

b) Proficiency: Proficiency is our ability to handle higher levels of complexity.

c) Cognitive and Behavioral skills: An ability to process information and the potential to display the right temperament during stress or whilst under pressure defines these skills.

While we agree that mapping all of these abilities is a complex task, it is it isn't impossible. Niche talent service companies like ours can successfully develop comprehensive skill profiles. And to successfully demonstrate this, we present to you ItsYourSkills!

What is ItsYourSkills?

This is a tool that provides a graphic picture of your skills including your current professional competence, talent level, deepest interest and areas for talent improvement. We've incorporated all important ingredients that go toward making talent, including - the functional aspects, proficiency, and behavioral traits.

Technology and the churn won't stop with this, though. It is certain that big data will transform the talent landscape in the years to come, much in the same way it has transformed many other industries already.

There are a few challenges that have to be successfully met before this can happen. The first challenge is data itself! In the talent space, data can be expressed in different ways, and is often unstructured.

The second problem is the nature of data that is used. Most of us have our resumes. Resumes have text; lots of them. And we all write our resumes in different forms, using our creativity to make them look appealing.

An era of intelligent systems that can understand data and cater to individual needs effectively could be a reality in a few years.

Talent-Spotting In a Churn
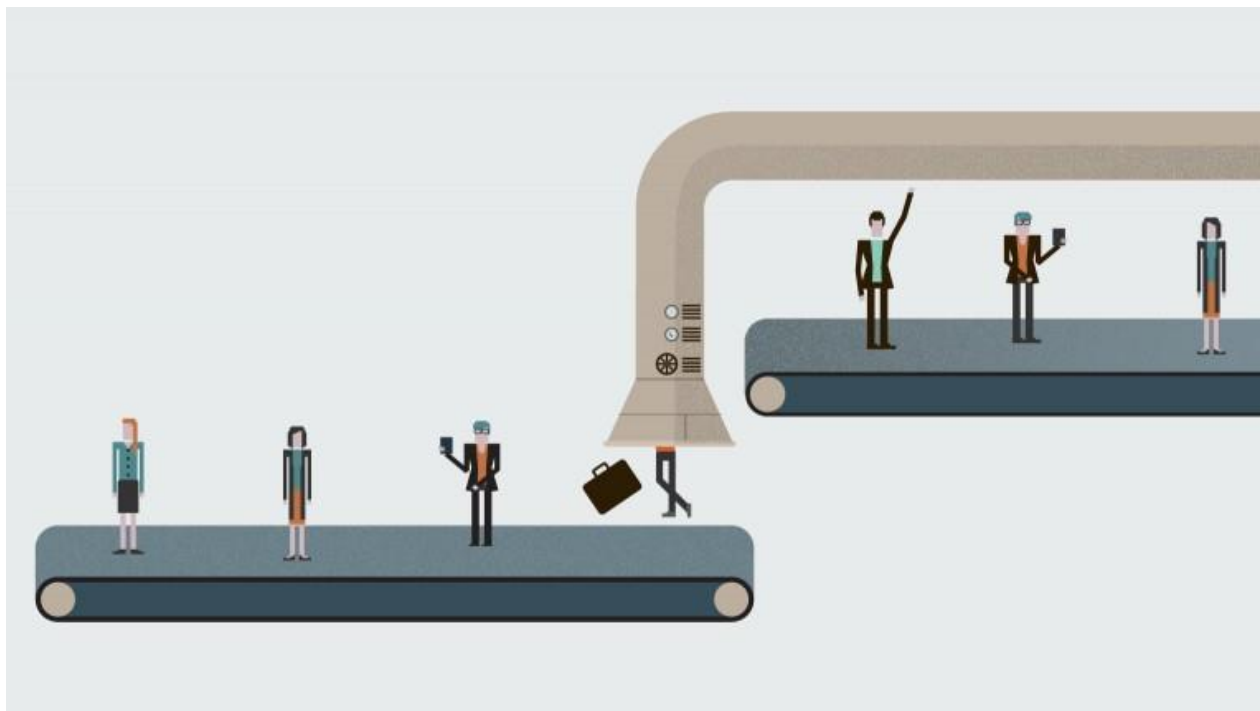
1. Introduction

The world of jobs and careers were very different back in 1994 when I completed my Masters in Business Administration from the Xavier Labour Relations Institute (XLRI), Jamshedpur.

It was still a typically old-fashioned world – one in which words such as the employment exchange and government jobs predominated. Finding an employer for life was a dream for almost every job aspirant.

The primary goal of a job seeker was to have a long and fruitful career with one company (yes, just one company), in the belief that both one's income and position in the overall hierarchy will grow with time. It was an era when the employer and employee seemed wedded to each other.

But it was also around this time, in 1994, that the forces of dramatic change were lurking around the corner. And strike they did!

In just a few years, the Internet, which has since undone vast industries globally even as it has helped create completely new ones, began its rapid journey from virtual obscurity to occupy the centre stage in people's lives.

Strong winds of change had already started blowing across India during the time, triggered by the country's dramatic shift from a form of socialism to a more liberalized economy. It was only a few years prior to my passing out from XLRI that the new economic regime was ushered in, giving wings to the dreams of private companies like never before. What happened over the following two decades was amazing. Indian job aspirants moved beyond their fascination for government jobs and began to pursue their dreams through the country's flourishing IT sector. Companies like Infosys, HCL, Wipro, etc. were now a global brand.

The new pathway for a typical job-seeker was etched through a BE degree that offered a calling card for an IT job sought arranged by an elaborate campus recruitment mechanism. This formula is now past its glory days and is fast becoming passé.

Technology's on a rampage and it is fast disrupting industries, brands, practices and work-related beliefs. Just look at what has happened in recent years to news media, especially in the most advanced markets of the world. It's now said to be the turn of the retail industry to be staring down the barrel.

Where are Nokia and Blackberry, superstars just a few years back, in the line-up of the top technology brands today? The answer is obvious. So relentless is the churn that it's futile to attempt stability in today's environment. It makes more sense for companies to be agile to anticipated changes.

With technology becoming cheap and ubiquitous, there's a greater threat of jobs being replaced by automation than ever before and of skills becoming redundant.

Companies like TCS, Infosys, Wipro and HCL shot into prominence during the 1990s and caught the imagination of the country's youth. Fast forward to the situation today where the newer lot of reputed brands Flipkart, Justdial or Makemytrip aren't really big on the number of people it employs.

There's a definite shift toward small yet nimble companies that use technology to the maximum to drive their business. With the democratization of technology, the barriers of entering a business have all but dissolved.

Blue chip companies still have their pride of place but a college pass-out today considers a career in a start-up with equal seriousness. The experience and responsibility that comes with working in a start-up is invaluable for a fresher.

But those aren't the only changes happening in the world of talent and jobs.

The concept of a career itself has changed. It isn't only about work anymore. A generational shift has taken place in India. The earlier generation of employees had to fight hard for their daily life and their jobs. The succeeding generation has had it much easier, with the economic foundations already built.

Therefore, the mantra now is to balance work amid competing priorities, such as family, leisure, other interests and even learning. But can an employer offer this balance?

Unlike earlier, your workplace is not limited within a well-defined cubicle at office that necessitates a   tiring commute. A workplace can be anywhere- a workstation at home or even your smart phone. You may also choose to work as a freelancer, and command premium rates if there's an impressive body of work to show.

Employment exchanges are an anachronism and are replaced by online platforms where people can pick and choose short-term work within the comfort of their home. Also, education and training aren't mere formalities to be completed before entering a career. These days, you can do it mid-career. Why, you can even do it right in the middle of a work-day, thanks to the mostly-free massive open online courses run by the top universities of the world.

Earlier formal education signaled your employability. But that's not the case anymore as people are forced to keep themselves up-to-date on skills to stay relevant and employable.

Employability isn't just a concern for those passing out of college - it is important for all level of professionals.

Companies, on the other hand, can source talent from virtually anywhere in the world. The access to worldwide talent is easier than ever. But in order to attract the best talent, they also need to present themselves well.

Businesses have recognized they need to be nimble. They've also realized they need to be open about working with partners and remain transparent in an increasingly Internet-driven world.
In a globalized world it isn't just a competition for one's products and services alone but also for one's talent. And as a result, wither the comfort zone!

To cut a long story short, the two important dimensions of the jobs market, viz. Talent demand and talent supply have been massively impacted by technology.

Change in the world of talent and jobs are the theme of this book. The book's chapters will be divided into three parts, each discussing a different dimension of change.

Part I is entitled 'What's Still Constant and What Changes.' It is about the constant need amongst us for development. Of course, only the need is constant. The tools to make development happen have undergone a massive transformation.

Part II, entitled 'What Ought to Change Soon,' is about the woefully inadequate tools for talent profiling, a prerequisite for talent improvement. It also details my attempt, through itsyourskills.com, to fill the gap.

Part III is about the inevitable future changes staring at us. Titled 'What Will Change,' it is about how the world of big data and analytics could disrupt the world of talent and jobs.

PART I

What's Still Constant and What Changes

2. The Need for Growth

A massive technology-triggered churn may be changing the way the world functions but there are a few aspects that remain constant. The single most factors that are immune to change is the need for growth.

It is an intrinsic impulse among us humans to put effort into developing our intellectual, physical and spiritual skills, regardless of the potential for reward. It becomes a continuous endeavor through one's life.

It was presented almost as a moral requirement by 17th Century Protestant theologian Roger Williams, who said, "The greatest crime in the world is not developing your potential. When you do what you do best, you are helping not only yourself, but the world."

So, what is growth?

It could mean different things to different people – more money, greater recognition, improved quality of life, and so on.

Growth usually begins when we appreciate and respond to a quality or trait in another person and seek to imitate it. This pushes us to learn. It could also flow from capabilities that we seek in ourselves or those that others find in us. We nurture and develop these skills over time.

Monsignor Cormac Burke, an Irish civil lawyer once said, "Our minds and hearts are broadened according to the worth of these observed qualities and our own ability to admire and assimilate them. Then these qualities become our own and we are truly enriched."

We are all unique in our own way. In the initial years of our life, our parents or teachers could spot a talent in us. This may be the start of a lifelong process of talent nurturing. Eventually, with age, we start making choices as to what learning path to take. These may be driven partly by a need to realize our talent, but also partly by the need to fulfill our most basic needs.

And thus begins our search for a job. Whilst working, we not only contribute to creating a product or a service, but also adequately compensate for the same. And this isn't purely monetary compensation. .

Sure, the salary at the end of the week or month is tangible and extremely important.. But there's more to it.

A job also gives us an opportunity to fulfill some of our higher needs. Remember American psychologist Abraham Maslow? His paper on, 'A Theory of Human Motivation' advocated a concept called the *hierarchy of needs*. Through the theory, Maslow proposed that humans have a hierarchy of five basic needs – physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualization. As one level is met, we set to seek the next higher level. "What a man can be, he must be," he wrote in his paper.

A job plays an important role in helping an individual fulfill his social, esteem and self-actualization needs. Through a job, we make numerous friends and connect with different kinds of people all the time.

We also get a feeling that we are playing a part in doing or creating something useful, something that's bigger than the individual and one that will touch many lives. Jobs enforce a discipline that soon becomes a habit among us.

Growth requires two things – talent development and talent engagement.

What do these terms mean?

Talent development

As the name suggests, talent development is a process by which we try to get better at what we do well. A housewife, for instance, wants to cook better. A painter wants to outdo his earlier

work. A programmer dreams of writing better code. You get the drift!

The opportunities for developing talent have been seen growing with every generation in this modern world. That's largely because of the advancement and democratization of technology and knowledge. The youth today surely have better access to technology, knowledge and education than the earlier generation.

Talent engagement is about how one could deploy his or her talent to create value for

others. A basic example here: imagine a gifted painter who paints as a hobby and for self-satisfaction. Now, if his painting is shared with others, the painter not only gets recognized for the work but also reaps monetary rewards.

And, yes, the new inter-connected world has impacted the way talent is engaged too. The defining feature of this world is the ease with which work can be shared with anyone else in the globe. If you are involved in digital work, the geographical boundaries don't matter much. It's far easier than earlier to spot talent in any corner of the world.

Access to markets has often been and still is dominated by oversized business entities whose marketing efforts often include buying and shutting down competition, forcing non-compete agreements upon employees and independent contractors, and, probably the most damaging of all, adopting the attitude that too much intelligence is a handicap in an employee.

I earlier made a point that our need for growth remains firm amid the huge changes brought by technology. The interesting thing is both talent development and talent engagement are finding newer expressions, thanks to technology. Both the job seeker and job giver need to be aware of this.

Chapter 2 highlights

- Our need for growth doesn't ever dim
- Our jobs play an important role in highlighting this growth
- Growth hinges on two aspects – development of our talent and opportunities at engaging our talent

3. New-Age

Talent Development

'The New York Times' called 2012 'the Year of the MOOC.' A few years earlier, the term MOOC, short for massive open online courses, was not even a part of our lexicon. It was in 2012 that players such as Coursera, Udacity and edX contributed to making the term popular.

These companies launched platforms where hundreds and thousands of online courses could be

offered virtually to anyone who had a broadband connection and an email ID.

Toward the end of 2013, Coursera's enrolment had crossed 5 million while edX over 1.5 million members. Several other players have now joined the bandwagon. Subjects offered on these platforms range from childcare and nutrition to law and environment. 'MOOCs have no doubt challenged the traditional education industry which now is anxious as to whether the old revenue model that has served it so well over many decades will survive. But MOOCs also help by pointing us towards a direction in which skill development is already moving.

What does development entail?

Consider the example of an engineer who says he wants to get better at his job. What could he mean? He perhaps wants to be able to solve more complex engineering problems.

Simply put, development means increased proficiency. Or, being able to do things faster or mastering new capabilities (even a new language).

In the early part of our lives, we were directed in our learning paths. As students, we learnt from the education institutions we were part of. MOOCs help people looking for knowledge that's beyond their basic degree. They now seem to sort of straddle the worlds of formal and informal learning. Yes, they do have a problem of massive dropouts. But one can easily visualize them being part of the formal educational channel pretty soon.

If you think India is not yet ready for such novelties, think again. Indians were only second to the Americans in taking to Coursera in 2013.

Moving beyond MOOCs, even the more traditional channels of formal learning have improved in recent years. There's no denying that the degrees, diplomas, certifications still command a lot of value amongst the job givers.

The avenues for pursuing them while simultaneously working have only grown in recent times. In fact, many corporate houses have tied up with educational institutions to be able to provide part-time education options for their employees.

There's a lot of innovation that has happened with respect to the course duration too. We now have a whole range of courses including one-year courses, satellite programs, onsite-offsite courses, and pure online courses.

In its newsletter in 2011, the International University Consortium for Executive Education pegged the total annual spends on corporate learning at a whopping $200 billion. It also quoted

'BusinessWeek' magazine that put the executive education market in the United States then at $800 million.

There are also opportunities for outbound training, e-learning and webinars. For an individual, the tough part is planning and committing time for such courses. Pursuing them alongside professional responsibilities can become extremely challenging and is the main reason why many drop out midway. One also needs to think about the goals behind investing in such courses. But today's world is not just about the formal education process. If one wants to learn something, virtually nothing prevents him or her from doing so. The Internet advances in recent years have meant that knowledge and information is in everyone's fingertips, really!

We have already discussed MOOCs at length. In addition, there are numerous resources online. While some need validation, there are several others that have the trust of the audience that follows them regularly. If you are into software development, there are developer groups and forums that you can access to learn and understand your world better.

There are numerous networks, both offline and online. Historically, networks have been an avenue for learning about updates in a particular area. The online ones are really raising the bar when it comes to ideas and co-operation; of course, they are also doing it real-time. Networks such as LinkedIn have made it easy for professionals in a specific field to follow each other. Yes, we do live in an era of information overload, forwarded messages, and limitations in time, wherein form takes over substance. However, the real stuff that matters in the long run is more investment of time from our side.

We need to identify the most appropriate sources of news and information (meaning, those that have good analysis, factual perspectives, and valuable insights) and maybe pay for them (often these do not come cheap, they cost money).

We need to choose a few good ones, and devote time for more than just reading the headlines from these chosen sources. From widely browsing over the general topics, we need to go deeper into a select few. Eventually, only such browsing and reading makes sense.

But in spite of the online onslaught, people are valuing the real learning experience even more. That's why we can now see a significant increase in personal trainers, executive coaches, and personal counselors. We, as human beings, have progressed thanks to our spirit of adventure, and the experiences gained from these adventures. And there are real-life laboratories in the corporate world that offer this important aspect more than ever before. Yes, the reference is to start-ups.

Youngsters today aren't averse to ditching a job offer in a big company in favor of working for a start-up. The learning curve in such a situation is steep. A youngster can dabble in a variety of roles and also take part in the decision-making of a resource-crunched start-up, gaining invaluable experience as a result.

Chapter 3 highlights

- MOOCs are a pointer to the direction talent development could take in the future
- Options for learning abound in today's world – better formal channels, online resources, webinars, and so on
- We need to be careful in identifying the most appropriate online resources, though

4. New-Age

Talent Engagement

Damien Hoffman, the Editor-in-Chief for the Wall St. Cheat Sheet, proposed websites like ODesk and Elance for the Nobel Prize in Economics in this column for The Huffington Post. (ODesk and Elance are online platforms matching freelance job seekers with job givers.)

His thoughts may have been provocative but they weren't off-track considering the fact the award that year was shared between Peter Diamond, Dale Mortensen and Christopher Pissarides. These economists had thrown light on why there was no instant matching happening when someone was looking for a job and someone else was looking to fill up a vacancy. The trio, in short, brought to the fore the issue of search costs.

Hoffman was suggesting in his column that the likes of ODesk and Elance had gone a long way, after the Monsters had played their part, in reducing these search frictions.

Online employment tools have indeed, in many cases, completely destroyed barriers to employment, including geographical barriers. Today, everything from recruitment, hiring, training, work and payment can be dealt within the virtual world.

In 2012 an Elance survey of 1,500 businesses across the globe revealed that a whopping 84% of recruiters believed online hiring gave them an advantage over competitors. They also predicted that in five years, 54% of their workforce will be freelancers, or otherwise working online. They were so happy with the quality of such talent.

Hiring online gives a three-way advantage: cost savings, faster time-to-hire, and access to talent otherwise not locally available.
As we speak, the top-three online job profiles are of web programmers, designers and content developers. But there are also attempts by local websites to help people hire plumbers, doctors and errand runners online too.

Elance and ODesk have now merged to bring under a single roof 8 million freelancers and 2.5 million businesses. "We're building a workplace for the world," Fabio Rosati, CEO of Elance-ODesk, was quoted as saying in the 'San Francisco Chronicle.'

We live in an era of talent, unlike anything seen in the previous agricultural age and the manufacturing age, where opportunities outside these professions were limited. The information technology era has brought knowledge to the fore. It has also seen the emergence of the services sector and large-scale entrepreneurship, where the most important thing is not finance but an ability to keep cost low for ideas to take shape.

The conventional engagement model of full-time employment has undergone a drastic change in the last few decades. In the '70s and '80swe had to make our choice, out of a few limited opportunities.

Things have changed a lot since then but this traditional employment model still makes up a significant percentage of the overall workforce. Full-time employment offers job security, predictability of income, and takes care of their welfare. It provides individuals an opportunity to enrich their capabilities and offers exposure to different areas and functions. Their need for recognition and self-esteem is also taken care of.

While full-time employment remains the most prevalent form of workforce engagement, the terms of such an engagement are changing dynamically. Organizations are maturing and trying to make the environment as conducive and flexible as possible to accommodate an individual's aspirations. On the flip side the lifespan of companies are getting shorter; the products and services they offer change at short notice, and organizational structures are undergoing a dramatic change. This implies that professionals will have to live with constant change. ..

Instead of focusing on the welfare of individuals in an organization, the focus is likely to be on business priorities. As long as our capabilities are needed and aligned to an organization's goal, our employment is guaranteed. If not, we will be disengaged from employment.

There seems to be a shift from trying to build loyalty to effective utilization of talent. We need to fine-tune our expectations from our company and focus our priority towards developing our talent. The fact that we need to develop our skills and make ourselves competitive should be our top priority and not of the organization. Great places to work will be those that engage us effectively and not those that create the best facilities for us to work.

A very high level of individualization and a fluid business environment are making it difficult to apply the same rules to large, diverse workforce satisfactorily. Individuals have more choices and their priorities are changing. The business environment itself has become turbulent, as predictability remains low with the rise of newer technologies and new businesses.

This is an area where non-full-time employment options are making great strides. Some individuals don't want to get tied in completely with just a company or a project and they are ready to sacrifice some of the predictability to gain a more rounded experience.

Individuals engaged in part-time employment have to develop and find opportunities for engaging their talent by themselves. However, this has become easy in the last few years. The connection between talent seekers and providers has increased. We know of housewives tutoring part time. Companies, who provide such service as a business, play a part as enablers in the process.

In 'The Future of Work,' Thomas Malone, co-director of the MIT initiative 'Inventing the Organizations of the 21st Century,' points to the revolutionary changes in organizational structures and the roles of employees. As per the book, the 'command and control' philosophy will give way to 'coordinate and cultivate.' Further, in the firm of the future, scale and

knowledge strengths of large organizations will work side-by-side with the freedom and flexibility of smaller organizations.

The HR role will have to change as well. According to Phil Johnson, global management consultancy Hay Group's global head of work measurement, "As market demands continue to change, organizational success will hinge on an HR's ability to connect human capital decisions with business strategy. She/he will need to stop clinging to traditional processes and inefficient silos and move toward an integrated approach that links work and people to business results. Such change is critical if HR is to transition to its rightful place of strategic business partner."

Business consultants have conducted studies that show that the emphasis amongst most executives right now is on "improving employee engagement" and "enhancing individual and team performance."

However, in the next five years it is expected that the emphasis by these same executives will be on "developing future leaders" as first priority and "ensuring greater return on investment through people" as second priority. "Attracting talent" is expected to enter the picture in third place in five years, when finally there will be an emphasis on this crucial aspect by the people who hire.

When the primary focus finally turns toward acquiring and nurturing of talent, it's highly likely that most other employment issues will disappear, especially if the talent is engaged online. What a contrast to five years ago when the main emphasis was on complying with legislation and reducing employee turnover.

Chapter 4 highlights

- Online job markets for freelancers are revolutionizing the marketplace for talent
- Organizations are becoming more aware of the need to provide for flexibility in full-time jobs
- HR's focus will turn toward acquiring and nurturing talent

PART II

What Ought To Change Soon

5. Talent Profiling

How very useful it is for the likes of Google, Amazon and Facebook to be able to read the minds of their customers! Well, it certainly helps these Internet giants recommend or push products, services and advertisements.

In fact, as users you are already exposed to customer profiling even if you are not aware about the concept. Profiling, about which we will discuss at length in the next part, is the centerpiece of their operating model.

Alas, only if the world of HR had similarly effectively tools for profiling talent!

What is talent profiling, and why is it so important?

In Part II of the book, we read about the exciting new tools for talent development and talent engagement. But they won't be of much use if not backed by effective talent profiling.

The term quite simply means knowing what we are, so as to be what we want to be. For a company, it is about knowing what talent is needed, so the right choice can be made. To speak inn lay man's terms, a doctor can prescribe the right course of medicines only if the patient's health profile is understood. Similarly, a marketer needs to understand the needs of the customer before trying to attempt a sell.

But profiling candidates is far more challenging than profiling customers. That's because of the sheer diversity and dynamically changing skill set.

Disappointingly, talent profiling hasn't stood up to the challenge as yet. Consider job portals. There's no doubt that they have managed to increase the opportunities for people to find jobs or for companies to find people. They, however, predominantly run on keyword search – i.e. the string of words that one uses to find matching candidates or jobs – a process that seems to have several limitations. The result: frustration for recruiters.

In my view, the ideal talent profiling tool needs to have three characteristics. One, it should be holistic. Two, it should be universal. And, three, it should have some way of standardization and normalization.

Let's look at them in detail.

Man is a sum of many parts. So, his talent profile is a sum of several skills. (Note: I will use the word skills loosely to include the harder and softer elements, knowledge and experience.)

Many of the current systems of profiling, whether a resume or a structured form used by job portals or psychometric assessments, have serious limitations. They look at some dimension of an individual's talent profile quite arbitrarily.

Last year, 'The Economist' magazine pointed to the pitfalls of trying to measure "touchy-feely" traits such as personality, stomach for leadership and emotional intelligence. "These are hard to measure," it said. The magazine also quoted Nik Kinley, co-author of 'Talent Intelligence,' who reckons that these tests could lead to misleading results.

It is no secret then that line managers are often frustrated with their HR personnel because they feel the latter does not have an appreciation of functional, technical matter or other real kills that matter.

HR, on the other hand, feels that managers are overplaying the functional-technical aspect while ignoring behavioral skills. Bottom-line: any talent profiling tool should be holistic, taking cognizance of these different skills areas.

Now, to the second point, every human being – young or old, educated or illiterate, CEO or an intern – has talent. And everyone wants to develop it. But many of the talent profiling systems are complicated and often exclude vast sections of people from their purview. HR uses

complicated jargon filled with competency mapping, which takes years to create and train people to use.

On the other hand, the mantra of today's world is simplification. This leads to inclusiveness. Even my mother, who lacks formal college education, can to video-chat with her grand-daughter in the US. If talent profiling is so important, it should be easy to understand and use. Universality is an important feature.

Third and final point, standardization and normalization lead to efficiencies. When everyone's on the same page, they benefit from an exchange of information, but if they're not, nobody would benefit from such an exchange.

Systems and processes can improve only if they create mechanisms for people to enter data in a certain defined pattern. By the way, this is why we have forms; so we don't have problems, say, with individuals typing different spellings of Bangalore. This is also why there are intelligent engines that can interpret that we are talking about the same thing; for instance, e-commerce sites understand that mobiles mean cell phones.

But standardization and normalization help in sourcing and use of information, cutting down the jargon and other barriers to understanding. And this, in turn, becomes yet another important step in the process of creating more intelligent systems - those that can analyze and interpret.

But while these three are necessary conditions, they are not adequate. A good talent profiling tool is more than these three attributes. We need to include more facets so that it can form a good guide for individuals to know where they are travelling to; where they can travel; what would reward them better and so on.

Chapter 5 highlights

- Both talent development and engagement can't be done well without profiling talent first
- Talent profiling tools have been disappointingly inadequate until now
- An ideal talent profiling tool should be holistic, universal, standardized and normalized.

6. What Goes Into Your Talent

Cartoonist Randy Glasbergen mocked job interviews in one of his typically humorous works where an interviewing lady tells the bemused candidate, "Your resume is bloated with half-truths, false praise, exaggeration and unsubstantiated accomplishments." And then the punch line: "I'd like to hire you to write our Annual Report."

The cartoon could be taken as a light-hearted take on the mysterious ways candidates are selected or rejected. But on a more serious note, skills and talent are actually a matter of a lot of nuance. It isn't a straight case of just what one studied or where one trained. Two candidates with the same functional skills might still differ due to various other sub-aspects, proficiencies and behavioral attributes.

Here's how they pan out:

Let's start with the functional aspect. First, you need to study to gain some expertise in a particular skill. Thus, knowledge of double entry bookkeeping and taxation laws are mandatory to qualify as an auditing accountant

Second, the core skills are refined by the tools and technologies one has a grasp of. From the broad concept of a 'programmer,' one can detail the specific languages related to the field (such as 'Java', C++, VB.Net, and so on).

Three, contexts are also important. Being a civil lawyer in India is different from being a civil lawyer in the US. Every context has its own set of nuances and hence awareness of the same and adopting the right tools is essential for practical application and contribution.

Four, there could be differentiation in the activities and the roles played by the candidate. An accountant in an engineering firm may bring different skills sets from that of another accountant who works as a consultant in an accountancy firm.

While some professionals may have contributory roles, others may play management roles. There could also be instances of dual roles.

Speaking of proficiency, every professional is good in certain skills and no so good in some. This 'goodness' in a skill differentiates ones profile from another.

Proficiency is our ability to handle higher levels of complexity. We are rewarded better when our skills are higher than that of a fellow professional with similar skills. Our aim and constant effort

would, therefore, be to develop our proficiencies, both for internal fulfillment and for better recognition.

We now know why some individuals are compensated more than others. The answer is that they have proved their ability to handle complex situations more effectively than others.

Let me explain this with an example of two project managers. Managing a project involves complexities - it involves managing a large number of people, a huge amount of information as well as technology. The more capable of the project managers is the one who measures up as being able to handle a more complex project.

What is important is to understand that our development should be a relative measure of our proficiencies at two different points in time rather than a comparison between our proficiency vis-à-vis that of others.

Finally, there are cognitive and behavioral skills.

These skills are invariably linked to specific traits, such as the type of personality. It is not impossible to infer traits based on the skills that a person is adept at. For instance, there is a very good chance that a person with a shy disposition may not be adept at marketing. Similarly, a person with good people skills but with basic operational knowledge may be ideal for leadership roles.

The consequences of placing people in wrong roles and making failures of successful people can be disastrous for a company. The following scenario is all-too familiar: a company recognizes a good programmer by promoting her to a team leader position; and in many cases, the company loses a good programmer and gets a bad team leader.

Reminded of the 'Peter Principle'? Laurence J Peter's and Raymond Hull's funny 1969 take on management suggested that people are often promoted until they reach their "position of incompetence." The Peter Principle has since made its mark in popular culture and management philosophy.

Here are some key behavioral skills at work:
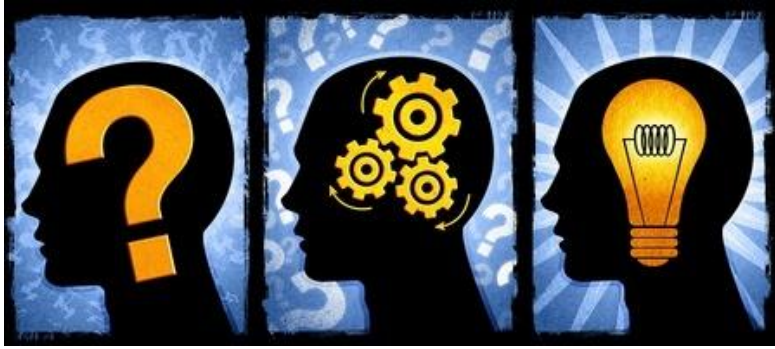
Analytical Thinking

Such a role involves breaking things into components or taking components already broken and considering these in new ways. Examples: researcher, data analyst, economist.

Non-Linear Thinking

Such a role requires bringing things together in pattern formation, pattern recognition, and breaking or creating codes. Examples: designer, product manager, music composer.


System Thinking

Such a role requires combining elements in functional order, or working within an established system. Examples: architect, product designer, application architect.

Strategic Thinking

Such a role involves combining activities or other elements in the best time sequence, or dealing with competition and changing market conditions. Examples: strategist, fund manager.
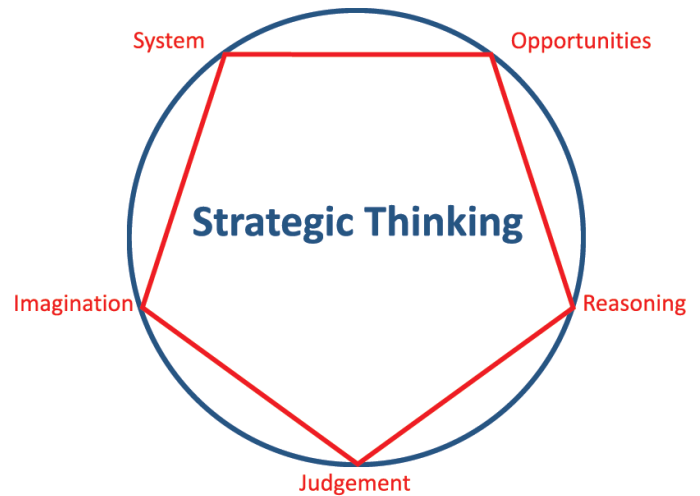
Hands-On

Such a role involves fiddling with machines, equipment and fixing them. Examples: mechanical engineers, systems administrators.

Creative Tasks

Such a role involves artistic pursuits. Examples: graphic designers, singers, dancers.

Knowledge-Centric

Such a role requires research, a grasp of new developments and putting together different pieces of knowledge. Examples: programmers, consultants, researchers.

Routine

Such a role involves what are called clerical activities. Examples: office assistant, data entry operations.

People Coordination

Such a role involves understanding different capabilities among people and knowing how to get work done from them. Examples: event managers, supervisors.

Similarly, a role in **communications** would involve listening, comprehending and articulating; **guiding others** will require understanding people and connecting with them; **socializing** skills could help in influencing people; **ideation skills** work well for someone trying to sell to others; and finally the **risk taking** trait is key for those creating a sellable product or service.

Can leadership skills be developed? All of us acknowledge that we can build on our strengths. Smartness is about playing to our strengths and developing these strengths more and more. The smartest of leaders get people of different strengths to build a team with diverse and required strengths. No one is a superman but yes there can be a super-team.

Chapter 6 highlights

- Talent isn't just a function of what one studied or where one trained – it involves a lot of other aspects.
- Understanding talent involves deciphering the different levels of everything from functional skills, proficiency, and cognitive and behavioral skills
- No one can be a super-man but, yes, there can be a super team!

7. ItsYourSkills!

Let's start with some nostalgia. Recall your school days, a time when you used to get a report card at the end of every term. Whether you gained an 'A' or a 'C' grade, the report card still served as your earliest skill profiling record.

Why haven't we been able to replicate the same process at the start of our careers? We should be able to, right? What we need are the following: a clear picture of our job skills, related skills,

proficiency level, our level of talent development, and so on. And all that a company needs to do is hire the right talent, not worrying about sifting through hundreds of resumes.

A graphic skills profile is perfectly possible. And it's with this view that we at 3D Talent Service have come up with a simple and effective tool called ItsYourSkills. The attempt is to overcome the limitations of the current set of talent profiling tools, about which we discussed in a previous chapter.

The starting point of the journey for ItsYourSkills was my perception about the wide spread problem of employees' dissatisfaction with their current jobs and lack of clarity about what to do about it. People often came to me with that uneasy question, "What choices do I have?"

I therefore set out to create a mechanism to touch this problem universally, and not treat it 'patient' by 'patient.' The Web was clearly an opportunity.

I needed to ask some fundamental questions, some of which have been elaborated upon in this book. Some of the questions were regarding the meaning of career, meaning of growth, the reason for unemployment and job vacancies to exist side-by-side, and so on.

The whole exercise led me to believe that there is tremendous inefficiency in the talent market. This led me to another question: how can efficiencies improve?

I figured out there was a need to bring about a new model for profiling talent, one that is universal. I also knew technology was going to play a huge role in all this. The result: ItsYourSkills!

This tool will help provide a graphic picture of your current professional competence, talent level, deepest interest and areas for talent improvement.

Here's what is possible: you can move from your core subject to related sub-sections. If you are good at three languages (say you know German, French and Spanish), these will be clubbed under 'Languages' and you can grade your proficiency.

Additionally, if you are adept at computer languages, such as CSS, Ruby, or Python, you can mention under the sub-section 'computer' and grade your level accordingly. By moving from the core to sub-sections, and deeper into further sub-levels, you will find that you have created an in-depth profile of yourself. A resume can never do justice to this.

All the important ingredients that go toward making talent - the functional aspects, proficiency, and behavioral traits - are incorporated in the tool.

So how does ItsYourSkills work?

At the outset, ItsYourSkills doesn't act as an evaluator. It provides for comprehensive profiling, so assessment becomes easier for the candidate as for the job giver.

It must be understood that different skills call for different types of assessment. It is much easier to judge the proficiency of an accountant than to assess the research ability of a science student.

Some skills are easily quantifiable, others aren't. There is also a lot of perception involved in regarding a person as an 'expert' or a 'topnotch' scientist. Subjectivity creeps in easily. But employers who hire people for the job need to have some inputs to make an informed decision. How can these limitations be overcome?

One way to do it is to get opinions or endorsements from colleagues, friends or bosses. This may go a long way in putting things in a proper perspective. Soliciting opinion on the prospective candidate from connected and trustworthy sources is another area that can be explored.

Crowd-sourcing could be explored. If you have downloaded an app, you would know how it works. You have an opportunity of grading the app on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the top score. This again has its limitations. We are fairly agreed on what makes a good movie or books, but many people will not know what makes for a good C++ programmer or an excellent database systems architect.

We believe we have made ItsYourSkills as comprehensive as possible, working on the following six aspects:

Expansiveness
Skills have been separated into many functional areas, and therefore it allows a person who has experience in various functional areas within a skill set to project the breadth of experience.

Clearly Definition
Specific skill sets have been broadly classified and intuitively arranged, so that an individual's profile is captured in its entirety and a clear picture emerges.

In-built Precision
A broad canvas of an individual's abilities from the basic to the highest level has been provided, taking into account the potential richness of different abilities.

Intuitiveness

Skill and proficiency level are rated on a five-point scale but it also depends on the characteristics of the individual skill. For instance, academic qualification in a particular subject will be tested on the three aspects of knowledge, understanding and application.

Flexibility
The mechanism for input of proficiency levels is employed in different ways across different applications. When it concerns self-development, an individual will assign his or her own rating on the current level of proficiency and the level they wish to attain. In picking a candidate for a particular role, the company can assign the ratings required in order to fulfill the criterion for a particular job or role.

Comprehensiveness
The application delves deeper into skills and other elements of proficiency, so a complete overview is provided. It offers a dynamic profile from the perspective of basic, functional, cognitive, supplemental, behavioral and managerial angles.

Chapter 7 highlights

- 3D Talent Service has come up with a simple and effective skills profile tool called ItsYourSkills
- All important ingredients that go toward making talent - functional aspects, proficiency, and behavioral traits - are incorporated in the tool.
- ItsYourSkills doesn't act as an evaluator but provides for comprehensive profiling, making assessment easier for the candidate and for the job giver

PART III

What Will Change

8. Big Data Is Here

If the current march of technology has overwhelmed you, wait for the world of big data and analytics to fully unravel!

We already hear a lot about them making a big difference in many areas. Big data is indeed driving a lot of fields such as financial sector, marketing, social media and healthcare. Why, even the famed Large Hadron Collider is a big data science experiment.

The new tech giants all thrive in this game. According to Wikipedia, retail giant Walmart handles more than 1 million customer transactions every hour, "which are imported into databases estimated to contain more than 2.5 petabytes of data - the equivalent of 167 times the information contained in all the books in the US Library of Congress." It also points out the fact that Facebook handles some 50 billion photos from its user base.

For the tech giants, more importantly, big data is the way by which they understand their customers. Take the example of Facebook and Amazon. The former is the world's most-sought after social media platform while the latter is the global leader in e-commerce.

What they do and very effectively at that, are the following: understanding the individual very well; and based on this understanding, present the user with appropriate choices brought from a huge marketplace.

Amazon studies our behavior by tracking the books we've bought, book reviews we've read, the platforms that we prefer to read our books, the frequently with which we buy, the price range and so on. Likewise, Facebook evaluates our interests, our friends' network, their preferences, our activities, the searches we make, and so on. In short, they create a profile of us.

The red flag here is on the issue of privacy. Some feel their privacy is violated, just so that someone else benefits. These concerns ought not to come up when the input of data is completely voluntary. Of course, it needs to be pointed out that the user also does benefit because of data collection.

Tracking the customer is just one part of the work of these big online brands. At another level, they pull providers of services or products that would be of interest to us. And they pull real hard. That's because, the larger the number of products and services, the better the chance that they will be able to meet our needs.

They lure the providers through many ways. They give tools to offline providers so as to get them to their platform. They also provide things like logistics and payment support that will help the providers service the customers better.

The important thing is to have an intelligent engine that will pick the right choices from really huge packets of data. This involves understanding group behaviors, making hypotheses on likely behaviors, analyzing data for patterns and creating algorithms based on them.

When you see the many recommendations that these sites make to us, you will be reminded about how this process works. Individuals can be precisely targeted now. The era of mass targeting has almost gone past us. For marketers, this is not just an opportunity to save money but also to target revenues better. The geographical barriers to advertising, marketing and distribution by small, remotely-located businesses are also virtually eliminated, as a result.

If this aspect of individualization can be replicated in the talent space, it will have huge implications not only in the HR world but for human development in general. But the big question is: can it be replicated? Well, let's be optimistic but there are challenges.

The first challenge is data itself! In most already-functional examples of big data (e.g., Google, Amazon and Facebook), data to profile us is collected in subtle ways. It is centered around the 'clicks' we make on the screen. Data can also be collected with users filling forms that are structured – where information about age, location and so on are filled up.

In the talent space, data can be expressed in different ways. Data is unstructured (it's mostly textual). Take a simple example. Let us say an employer makes a job posting for a 'software engineer.' Maybe what she wants is a programmer. And there are many people out there who call themselves as 'programmers'. But if we don't have a way to tell a system that software engineer = programmer, then all the people who call themselves 'programmers' are going to be left out of the process.

The second problem is the nature of data that is used. Most of us have our resumes. Resumes have text; lots of them. And we all write our resumes in different forms, using our creativity to make them look appealing.

But to bring out data from all these creative texts to manipulate-able data is a big challenge. We have a number of resume parsers, which extract text and put them into manipulate-able data form. However, they are severely limited in their capabilities. Most of them may do a good job of pulling out information on education, age, companies one has worked in, title, and so on. But they are severely limited when it comes to skills. And this matters more than all others.

This challenge shows itself at a different level. Companies expect employees to fill up various forms at different points – at the time of joining, training, appraisals and so on. There are three issues with this, however. One, data on skills which are central to talent remains uncaptured.

Two, data remain in silos on different systems. Three, data is not dynamically updated even as employee scenarios changes.

For effective delivery of talent development and engagement using big data and analytics, we need the data-fication of talent.

An intelligent engine can help individuals understand the changes happening in the market - say, what skills are hot - and help them to adapt faster. Such an engine can also enable better talent engagement.

Let us take an example. Imagine a chemical manufacturing company is looking for a program manager to set up a new plant in Africa. An ideal profile could be one who has been in chemical engineering and who has been a program manager and one who has also had exposure in Africa also experience setting up new plants.

Such a combination itself may not be available in the market. However, if we analyze the requirements, the most important requirement is program management. Maybe there are people in the market who are good in program management or project management in the manufacturing industry who could fit this position. But such connect is possible only if the system knows what is key and what is not and also knows what are similar skills (program management = project management).

What enterprises need are intelligent systems that can cater to individualization. They also need to develop capabilities for use of data on skills. So far, companies have not been thinking this way. This would call for looking at an employee not from the viewpoint of demographics but from the basis of the talent profile.

Big data might have a long way to go in the area of talent but it seems more certainly as the way to go.

Chapter 8 highlights

- Big data will transform the world of talent and jobs in the years to come
- The likes of Facebook and Amazon have managed to profile their customers very well but profiling talent is a real challenge
- If the aspect of individualization is replicated in the talent world, it will have huge implications for human development in general

The Road to the Data Future

Earlier this year, Deloitte brought out the 'Global Human Capital Trends 2014' report that surveyed more than 2,500 business and HR leaders from over 90 countries.

The report came up with some revealing statistics about the use of (or rather the lack of) analytics by human resource departments across companies. .

The survey reported that 86 percent of companies had no HR analytics capability. In comparison, 81 percent of the companies use analytics in finance, 77 percent in operations, 58 percent in sales, and 56 percent in marketing.

According to the report, only 7 percent of the large companies "rated their organizations as having "strong" HR data analytics capabilities today."

At the same time, over three-fourths of large companies thought HR and talent analytics issues as "urgent" and "important."

While recognizing that a data-led HR future is inevitable, it is important to point out that the transition will happen over many years. The Deloitte report itself pointed out that it could take three to five years for companies to build a strong talent and analytics function.

CIPD, the professional body for HR and people development, in a report in November 2013, pointed to three factors impeding the use of big data in organizations. They were barriers to sharing data, capabilities to deal with data, and cultural barriers.

Analytics is perhaps used in some of the HR information systems. But the focus here is far greater on manpower analysis, emphasizing on aspects such as age, location, and experience.

But what we need are data at the skill level. That's what will make talent handling more intelligent. Improved talent profiling tools are surely going to be a step toward this future. Change is again in the air!

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